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by Mara R. Archer

Introduction

Fostering a successful creative culture almost seems an impossible task especially for for-profit companies because creativity is undefinable. Particularly in the entertainment industry, talent agencies and studios are known for their harsh work climates. Ed Catmull, co-founder and president of Pixar Animation, published *Creativity, Inc. Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* in 2014 with his editor Amy Wallace. Although Amy Wallace is listed as an author, the book is only written in Catmull's voice. Catmull describes the arduous process of sustaining a creative culture. After describing what a creative culture looks like, Catmull explains how managers can successfully lead their people via a series of lessons that he learned while managing Pixar. By focusing on the goal of fostering a creative culture, Catmull's leadership lessons, supported by detailed stories, are simple to understand yet difficult to digest because creativity is abstract.

Summary

Catmull's thesis is that a successful creative culture is a culture of candor, determination, and collaboration. *Creativity, Inc.* (2014) is a unique book in that it discusses leadership even though its goal is not leadership; the book's goal is how to build a creative culture. In explaining how to construct a creative climate, Catmull additionally describes leadership values. The book is separated into four parts that represent the stages in the process to implementing and sustaining a creative culture: Part I: Getting Started, Part II: Protecting the New, Part III: Building and Sustaining, and

Part IV: Testing What We Know. These parts are further subdivided into chapters which delve into specific moments in Pixar's history that eloquently show a characteristic of leadership within a creative culture.

Evaluation/Analysis

By arguing the complexity of nurturing a creative culture, Catmull adeptly teaches leadership. Each chapter describes a unified leadership quality shown by a relevant Pixar event. Every chapter's leadership lesson supports one of the four overarching parts or stages of implementing a creative culture. For example, in describing creativity's complexity, Catmull devotes a chapter to "Change and Randomness" within Part II: Protecting the New (2014, p. 145). In the chapter, Catmull describes the difficulty he had maintaining the culture that he had created at Pixar when he announced that Pixar would be acquired by Disney. After quickly communicating the dilemma that he was facing to calm his employees about the acquisition, Catmull turns to describe the differences in how people perceive change and randomness separately. He says, "Rather than fear randomness, I believe we can make choices to see it for what it is and to let it work for us. The unpredictable is the ground on which creativity occurs" (p. 148). Catmull continues by illustrating life via a mathematical concept called stochastic self-similarity. Stochastic self-similarity is the idea that a piece of a whole looks like or represents the whole. For example, a part of a snowflake appears as a "miniature version of the whole" (p. 159). What Catmull argues is that people believe that life consists of big events and small events. A big event could be a birth or a death, and a small event is a favor-

ite song playing on the radio. But the reality is that there are no big or small events because both events are subject to randomness. It is personal perception of events that categorizes events into big and small and into the level of subjectivity to randomness. For example, a birth might not seem as random as a song playing on the radio, but perception is the only thing that differentiates the randomness and importance of these events. However, randomness is not discriminatory; it is unaware of how much one event will influence a life more than another. In this way, Catmull shows change as a random event that cannot be controlled. Perceiving change as uncontrollable encourages managers and workers to not take change so seriously that it feels threatening. Instead, change should be viewed as crucial to, and an opportunity for, creativity.

In describing the complexity of creativity and a creative culture, Creativity, Inc. (2014) can be difficult to digest. According to Catmull, creativity cannot and should not be defined, yet his book is about creativity. A book that tackles a subject that is undefinable and complex, according to the author, lends itself to being complicated and overtly abstract. While Catmull carefully breaks down the book into four stages of the creative culture process, the individual chapters themselves can seem scattered at times because the lessons are not in chronological order. Furthermore, the lack of chronology causes Catmull to repeat examples from previous chapters when describing how to fix a more recent problem. The repetition is helpful but can be overwhelming. Again, Catmull says that creativity is undefinable, and a creative culture can only be described. In a book that explains the undefined and the perceived, it becomes a challenging yet necessary read because the leadership lessons that Catmull teaches are lessons that every leader running an organization should be aware of.

Conclusion

Catmull describes what a creative culture looks like without defining creativity. According to the author, creativity is indeterminate but can be observed. Although the purpose of the book is to discuss nurturing creativity within a business, Catmull's book stands alone because he accentuates the importance of leadership within a Hollywood studio. Catmull's humility and eloquence shine through his personal stories of successes and failures at Pixar. None of his stories derail the narrative from the importance of sustaining a creative culture. His depth of knowledge from managing two successful studios, Pixar and Disney Animation, can be overwhelming at times for a reader. However, for any manager wanting to promote a creative culture, Catmull's lessons prove clear and necessary.

References

Catmull, E. E., & Wallace, A. (2014). *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration*. New York, NY: Random House.